PRESS RELEASE

USS Pueblo

COMMAND INFORMATION BUREAU

U.S. NAVAL AMPHIBIOUS BASE, CORONADO, CALIFORNIA TELE: AREA CODE 714 - 435-4186

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CIB REL. NO. #61-69
20 FEBRUARY 1969

PROCEEDINGS OF THE COURT OF INQUIRY

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The Court convened at 9 a.m. with Quartermaster First Class Charles B. Law as the first witness. He testified that he received no training in survival and escape methods at any time prior to capture by the North Koreans. He said the only indoctrination he had received concerning the Code of Conduct was during basic training.

He further stated that he had heard word passed by CWO Lacy just prior to boarding to the effect that all members were to give only name, rank, serial number and date of birth. He said he fully understood these orders and adhered to them in the beginning, but eventually deviated from them.

(more)

CIB 61-69
2-2-2

QM1 Law said his interrogation began six or seven days after his arrival at the location of the first phase of the crew's detention, and that it occurred five more times during the ensuing months.

He recalled no mistreatment during these interrogations, the longest of which lasted three hours, the shortest one hour.

Law told of the North Korean photographers, of readings from the Pueblo's position log which he was ordered to plot for the captors. He said he did so, under threat of death, and the co-ordinates he plotted were only those of intrusions into the "claimed" territorial waters of the North Koreans as recorded by the Loran navigational instruments. Law said he tried to explain about the inaccuracy of the Loran system and even used as an example an impossible 25-knot speed necessary to obtain one fix, but, he said, his explanations were ignored.

He said the navigator was given a similar plotting assignment, but he (Law) at no time changed any of the co-ordinates plotted by the navigator for the North Koreans.

Law cited the possibility that some of the positions he plotted from the log entries could have been altered, since they were entered in pencil. Also, he said, there was the possibility of faked pictures and readings.

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Law's testimony paralleled others with respect to examples of tricks played using as a basis the failure of the captors to comprehend many of the gestures and idioms of the English language, either because of unfamiliarity with the same or, as Law stated frequently, because of the "stupidity" of the North Koreans in charge of the detention.

He mentioned in particular the disobedience of the Pueblo crew during marching, often resulting in mass confusion, made to appear a result of misunderstanding of the North Korean instructions.

Law recalled his care in the "Hull Week" beatings as a 39-hour interrogation, beginning at 10 a.m. on December 12th and lasting until 1 a.m. on the 14th, during which time he was beaten for eight consecutive hours. He believed "Hull Week" was brought on as a result of the discovery of the meaning of the "finger gesture" displayed at one of the [illegible] press conferences.

He told of being beaten with a pole similar in thickness to a 2 X 2. After that broke in half, he said he was beaten with one of the pieces, until that broke in half. The beatings were continued using a 4 X 4. Law estimated having received 250 to 300 assorted blows, including blows and bare-fisted strikes to the head. He said they tried to force him to confess that he was a CIA agent and the investigator of all acts of sabotage against the North Koreans. He denied this.

Law described the inflammation of his optical nerve caused by malnutrition and vitamin deficiency. He said that around the first of August his eyesight began to fail and that by September he was almost totally blind. Although he did receive treatment in the form of injections by a North Korean eye doctor, the ailment was never cured, and as a result he has, at present, 20/200 vision, uncorrectable by glasses. At the beginning of the detention period, he had near-perfect eyesight.

Law believed he was chosen to be in charge of the petty officers due to his appointment as athletic co-ordinator, which he thought was done at the suggestion of the PUEBLO's executive officer. Later, he recalled, Hammond was selected to share the petty officer leadership duties with him. This resulted, he said, in considerable extra punishment since both of them, Law in particular, would often be held responsible for the actions of others.

He also stated, however, that frequently a man would admit to an act he had not committed in order to spare a man in poorer physical shape the strain of the punishment. Law said he had done this on occasion.

(more)

CIB REL. 61-69
5-5-5

Law told of the four letters he had written, all containing prescribed substance matter to the effect that the crew had been engaged in a hostile act, had intruded in "claimed" North Korean territorial waters, and wished for an apology on the part of the United States in order that they might be released. He said he knew they were lies, but was forced to send them and felt that in doing so, he would at least be able to enclose a brief personal message, so erroneous it would reveal the fallaciousness of the whole content. The two which contained personal messages were to his uncle, the others to the President and the Governor of Washington.

He said he was disappointed in the failure of the United States to retaliate and that was, in fact, a large factor in his decision to cooperate with the North Koreans in some way, at least outwardly, in order to cut down on the constant physical abuse, which, he believed, he would have to endure without end unless he made the confessions the North Koreans were demanding.

Regarding the effectiveness of the Code of Conduct, Lee said he believed it should apply only to a foot-soldier, in that a person of this type would have only a few minor possessions on him in the event of capture and would be only a single unit, not like an entire crew of men aboard a ship, which has been captured in its entirety, along with all the facilities and records. In such a case as this, he felt the Code should not apply.

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[illegible]

He felt the confessions at the press conference should, by their contrived nature, be taken by the general American public as a hoax. He testified to have believed at the time the [illegible] of the press conference "highly contrived" would be seen as an indication of the [illegible] of the entire conference.

[illegible] said he didn't believe the crew had been brainwashed [illegible] the Chinese, they were trying to sell the North Koreans [illegible] and not [illegible] themselves.

He expressed his feelings toward the [illegible] as being in [illegible] regard for Commander Bucher as a [illegible] and he would "give a lot to serve under him again."

Lieutenant [illegible] was the next [illegible] witness. [illegible] to questioning by Counsel for the Court he said he [illegible] himself to [illegible] training in the [illegible] but that he had [illegible] in the [illegible] for several years and was familiar with [illegible] by [illegible] several [illegible].

He said that throughout his confinement he [illegible] in the [illegible] He said he had [illegible] an [illegible] the [illegible] but was forced to [illegible] it [illegible] was told by a [illegible] whose [illegible] described as [illegible] that he [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

crewmen. He said he was asked frequently about medical histories of various crewmen by the doctor. The only broken bones Baldridge could remember were the result of sports accidents, except for the broken jaw sustained by Hayes during Hell Week.

Baldridge said he underwent only two formal interviews, the first about three weeks after arrival. This lasted about fifteen minutes and concerned only his name and birthplace. The second, four days later was an attempt to determine whether he was legitimately a hospitalman. Interrogators worked with a Korean to English medical dictionary.

He said he considered the medical treatment afforded crewmen adequate, and that he did not believe any men were close to death because of malnutrition, although about half the crew had medical problems which were probably due to food borne disease vectors. He said Radioman Hayes contracted infectious hepatitis and was isolated during treatment with penicillin and nutritious diet; that when Hayes returned he appeared to be cured. He said the crew was warned repeatedly not to drink cold water in the showers; that only boiled water was potable. He said only limited amounts of warm water for bathing was made available. He said all the officers, especially Cdr. Bucher were concerned with the welfare and health of the crew throughout the detention.

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Working from his service record, interrogators questioned him about previous duty stations. They also deduced from records that he was married to an Oriental and he said he believed he may have taken some additional punishment for this reason. He said his interrogators took considerable interest in this fact. He said he wrote two letters to his wife and two to his mother and included some material supplied by captors at their insistence. He said he signed the letter to the President on advice of Cdr. Bucher. He said he appeared in one press conference where he reported on the health and medical treatment of fellow crewmen. He said the statements he made during the conference were true.

In October, Baldridge related, crewmen were visited by civilians allegedly to test their sincerity for repatriation. He was asked if he would consent to a visit from a man named "KIM" when he returned home. He replied that as a military man he could not receive communist visitors.

He said he described the "Defiance Gesture" as a good luck symbol, and received some extra punishment during Hell Week when the lie was discovered. He said that he was told at one point to confess to crimes against daily living. These included sleeping in his room, making up nicknames for guards, laughing, and other such offenses.

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CIS REL. 61-69

9-9-9-9

Baldridge said [illegible] room. He said some [illegible] but these were [illegible] believe any [illegible] detention. He said he was [illegible] capture, but derived strength from [illegible] was aware of no reference being made to [illegible] after the crew was imprisoned. He said he was [illegible] North Koreans at one time of being ordered by [illegible] poisons from the infirmary to kill the crew. [illegible] statement Baldridge said he was demoralized [illegible] by not being able to use his eighteen years of [illegible] to help his fellow crewmen. He also praised Cmdr. [illegible] and Lt. Murphy.

The next witness was Radioman Second Class Lee Roy Hayes. He stated he read and had knowledge of the Code of Conduct, but could not recall references to it in the Pueblo plan of the day or on-board lectures. He recalled hearing the executive officer call for the giving ~~of~~ name, rank, and serial number only after the decision had been made to surrender the ship.

Hayes said he was interrogated formally twice; the first time about two weeks after capture, and the second four days later. He said that questions were interspersed between threats of death and beatings, although he was not beaten at these two sessions. He maintained that he was concerned and knowledgeable only on the subject of transmitters. He said he had seen North

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CIP REL. 61-69
10-10-10

Koreans beating Sgt. Hammond. He was not recalled for further questioning by the North Koreans. He said that he also heard Lt. (j.g.) Schumacher being beaten, and saw Cmdr. Bucher after he had been beaten. Hayes said he was assigned the duty of cleaning Cmdr. Bucher's room, and that he had frequent contact with him. He described the process by which Morse Code was tapped on radiators and walls during detention. He said that radiator pipes ran vertically, rather than horizontally through rooms, making long range communication difficult. He said he believed the North Koreans tried at one time to join the Morse Code network by tapping messages themselves. He recalled from Boy Scout days that a receiver could be made from materials they could find, including a headphone from the projector used for propaganda movies. He started making such a device, and Strano had it completed except for stealing the earphone just before "Bell Week." An antenna guy wire outside Strano's window was to become the antenna, and Strano had manufactured a crude battery.

Hayes said there was some talk of escaping, perhaps during the monsoon, but none ever came. Hayes said he didn't believe such an attempt would have been successful.

He said the crew expected immediate retaliation by the United States, were prepared to die if it came, and were disappointed that it did not. In one of his letters to his aunt he recalled that he inserted a phrase that he expected a bright light to come from the United States, an oblique reference to a nuclear bomb. He said that in his letters home he capitalized all the "Ks" in

the word "Right" to assure his family that he was maintaining his conservative right-wing political beliefs. He said he was forced to write a letter to Senator Stephen Young of Ohio. In response to questions from the court, Hayes said he believed the ship's chain of command remained effective and mentioned Quartermaster First Class Law and Cmdr. Bucher as outstanding leaders. He said he searched his room for clandestine listening devices and found none, and the authorized ones were installed. In response to a question concerning his opinion of the Code of Conduct, Hayes said he felt that it contained some good principles, but that some of them were impossible to follow.